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ABSTRACT

The outline presented here grew out of the realization that though a great deal of study has been done on conflict, there has been little effort made to organize the concept for teachers. The concept of conflict provides a rich tool for teachers to analyze much of human behavior. When applied intelligently, it can bridge the gap between very personal conflict situations and those remote conflicts occurring between nation states. Its study can also help teachers to manage the conflicts lying just beneath the surface of his classes. There are hundreds of ideas about conflict which can be examined in thousands of human events. Knowing that the reader will think of the many applications, the chief focus here is on the ideas. First, a definitional statement about conflict is presented; one which encompasses a wide range of human behavior. Suggested also are several cognitive objectives, and some desirable attitudes toward conflict which you may want to develop in your students. A tentative model of the process of conflict and its resolution is offered, and ways of using this model as a basis for student activities are suggested. Finally, some other student activities are described which can provide some practical experience in recognizing and resolving conflicts. SO 001 509, SO 001 511, and SO 001 513 are related. (Author/JLB)

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GUIDE TO THE CONCEPT: CONFLICT

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PREFACE

The need for this paper was discovered during the process of trying to encourage teachers to write their own curriculum materials on problems of human conflict. We realized very soon that, though a great deal of study has been done on conflict, there has been very little effort made to organize the concept for teachers. The outline presented here is by no means a final product. I doubt that there ever will be one. Hopefully, it can aid other teachers as it has those in the Diablo Valley Education Project in dealing more effectively with this all-important concept.

The ideas presented are by and large not original with the author. The organization of them, however, is largely mine. Others to whom I am deeply indebted for the ideas included are David N. Daniels, MD, Psychiatrist in the School of Medicine at Stanford University; Robert North, Professor of Political Science, Stanford University; Jack Fraenkel, Associate Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies, San Francisco State College. I cite them not to indicate their endorsement of my work but to give recognition to the extent of their influence on me as I've attempted to develop this outline.

GUIDE TO THE CONCEPT: CONFLICT

The concept of conflict provides a rich tool for teachers to analyze much of human behavior. It is a concept which, when applied intelligently, can bridge the gap between very personal conflict situations and those remote conflicts occurring between nation-states. It can serve as an important tool of analysis in comparing pre-historic with modern cultures or animal conflicts with human conflicts. It can even be used to analyze the conflict between man's desire to protect his environment from pollution and his necessity to develop the earth's resources for his own survival. Its study can also help teachers to manage the conflicts lying just beneath the surface of his classes. The irony is that, though conflict is present in every classroom and in every teachers' meeting, it is frequently ignored as a legitimate subject in the curriculum.

When a student fidgets in his seat, he is probably experiencing conflicts. Arguments on the playground are conflicts; football games are conflicts. Courtrooms and city council meetings are the scenes of conflicts. Fear and anxiety in our lives are signals of conflict. We can avoid or suppress our conflicts at times. We can use or threaten violence to eliminate our adversaries, or we can take initiatives through bargaining, compromise, reconciliation, arbitration, adjudication or legislative settlement; but we cannot escape from conflict--it is ever-present in our lives. Now, with nuclear war a possibility, our ability to handle large-scale international conflict is essential to our very survival. That in itself is sufficient reason to make conflict a central concern throughout the curriculum. But even if we were not so threatened, we need to understand the nature and dynamics of conflict, just because it plays such a crucial part in our everyday relationships.

Despite the importance of conflict in our lives, we tend to avoid dealing with it explicitly. We regard it as a fact of life, all right, but usually assume that it will lead to violent battle--ultimately even war--and we have little hope that this 'inevitability' can

ever be changed. We tend even to treat those who are concerned about conflict and war as naive about man and his behavior. There is something incongruous about this dichotomy in thinking. It cannot be both ways. Conflict is either important and therefore worthy of study, or it is unimportant and deserves to be ignored. In my own experience, I have found that as people become more familiar with the varieties and functions of conflict they tend to become less pessimistic about man's future and less naive about man's ability to cope effectively with conflict. As students become more familiar with the wide range of non-violent processes for handling conflict, avoidance and violence are soon seen as inadequate approaches to conflict destined to disappoint those who rely on such techniques.

There are hundreds of ideas about conflict which can be examined in thousands of human events. Knowing that you will think of the many applications, the chief focus here is on the ideas. Suggested also are some desirable attitudes toward conflict which you may want to develop in your students and some reasons for their importance. Finally, a few simple activities are described which can provide some practical experience in recognizing and resolving conflicts.

A DEFINITION

There is no perfect definition of conflict. The chief argument among social scientists regarding its definition is over the scope it should cover. Some argue that it needs a narrow definition lest it lose all meaning. Others feel that a broad definition encompassing a wide range of human behavior is essential.* We opt here for the latter.

The word 'conflict' is often used in two quite different ways: 1) as the active battling or fighting of opposed forces, and 2) as a state of discord, dilemma or disagreement between seemingly incompatible objectives or methods of pursuing a common objective, by either individuals or groups. The latter use of the word 'conflict'--as a natural state which occurs when a stressful situation of discord, dilemma or disagreement arises--is the one used here. Conflict occurs when two or more parties perceive and pursue mutually incompatible objectives or use mutually incompatible methods in the pursuit of the objectives. Conflict also arises within the individual when he perceives or experiences within himself mutually incompatible aims or objectives.

Elements of conflict occur naturally in all human relations and at every level of life experience from the intrapersonal to the international. Conflict situations can lead either to cooperative or to competitive plans of behavior and action. Man's ability to identify conflict situations and resolve them is an adaptive process linked to his evolution. The types of situations that can produce conflict are endless and limited only by man's imagination or his ability to desire a set of goals and feel violated if they are not achieved. These include personal desires, economic factors, religious and ideological beliefs, racial prejudice and political power--to name only a few.

Reaching a definition of conflict can be an excellent learning experience in itself. It is fascinating to see the definition grow as additional data are encountered which require a revised definition in order to account for all the phenomena.

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* For a discussion of this argument see, Clinton F. Fink, "Some Conceptual Difficulties in the Theory of Social Conflict," Journal of Conflict Resolution, Vol XII, No 4, pp 412-460.

We develop our attitudes toward conflict in a thousand subtle ways. From infancy, we are in conflict with our environment for warmth, emotional security and sustenance--and, though we are unaware of it--with other humans around us. Our uninhibited expression of anxiety brings about a change in our environment, usually because of the effect our stress has on our parents. Beyond the signal function which anxiety provides, most of our response to conflict is learned from the culture around us. This accounts for the diversity in how conflict is managed from culture to culture.

In our own culture, we get conflicting instruction. Our democracy is based on principles which presume a lot of conflict among men and which provide elaborate procedures for resolving it without violence. Many of our institutions are founded on a sense of compassion, and a spirit of cooperation pervades them. Yet, we are fascinated by violence, even glorify it as a means for resolving conflict. Our folk heroes of the West rely heavily on violence. We required 'unconditional surrender' in World War II. And the slogan 'we have never lost a war' is important to our heritage. Our TV heroes predominantly use violence in their conflicts with evil. So, by the time we mature, we frequently have attitudes toward conflict which are maladaptive for the situation of change and conflict which confronts us. If we are to change our approach to conflict, we must examine our current attitudes toward it and seriously consider those attitudes which might make us less reliant on violence--*assuming, of course, that less violence among men is a good thing.*

SOME DESIRABLE ATTITUDES TOWARD CONFLICT

.Acceptance of Conflict as a Naturally Occurring and Expectable Facet of Human Experience.

There is nothing abnormal or pathological about the occurrence of conflict per se. Conflict occurs repeatedly in the natural course of one's life. All too often it is viewed as unnatural, 'sick,' and to be avoided and/or suppressed. Acceptance of conflict as a necessary and even desirable 'signal' to reappraise our goals and expand our knowledge and views of coping is the first requisite for the successful handling of conflict.

.Recognition that Feelings of Anger and Anxiety Serve as Signals of Conflict, as Indicators that Something is Going Awry which Requires an Alteration in Our Plans or Objectives.

The signal function of anger or frustration is especially important because it indicates a blockage in our plans of action and induces a sense of being violated or threatened. It is important to accept this anxiety and anger and then to assess the blockages, interferences or interruptions in our goals and plans of action, so that a reassessment of how to handle the conflict can be made.

.Belief that it is Possible to Resolve Conflicts through Non-Violent Means.

A prevalent attitude among many peoples (certainly including Americans), is that violence is especially effective in gaining one's ends and in solving problems which can seemingly be resolved in no other way. The attitude needs to be inculcated that this simply is not so. Violence, in fact, often destroys the possibility of peace or the realization of the goals it promises. Non-violent means of solving or settling conflict requires commitment, courage, strength, resourcefulness, persistence, organization--even institutions (e.g., democracy). Non-violence is not passive. Non-violent action can lead to a sense of achievement, pride, self-actualization and goal realization.

.Belief that Violence, as a Means of Settling Conflict, Threatens Our Existence and the Quality of Life.

We must try to understand the violence that surrounds us, in hopes of finding alternatives to it that will both enhance survival and meet today's demand for change. Violence is becoming more dangerous than ever before, not because man is becoming more violent, but because violence itself is more dangerous than ever before in this complex, crowded world of complex and constant change. Thus, violence increasingly is losing whatever value it may once have had in the long history of mankind's evolution.

.Commitment to Seeking All Possible Alternatives to War and Other Forms of Violence as a Means of Defending Values in Society or for Causing Social Change before Considering Violence for these Purposes.

.Resistance of Temptations to Place Blame in Conflict Situations and, Instead, Focusing on the Problem of Finding Non-Violent Resolutions to Conflicts that Satisfy as Many Goals as Possible for All Parties Involved.

Because of man's marvelous brain, he has the capacity to

justify virtually anything and everything that he does. Resorting to violence (whatever the issue at hand may be) depends on attributing evil motives to the other party or 'outsiders.' Then, because 'they' are violent (evil), 'we' have to be violent; or (twisted even further), because 'they' are violent, it is good for 'us' to be violent. Through this process, mankind seems to be capable of justifying any violence. By focusing on the conflict instead of the 'evil' of the other party, it becomes possible to see ways in which both parties could achieve their goals or develop compatible methods for achieving common goals. One place where this is institutionalized is in the democratic process.

.Belief that War as it is Now Conducted is a Failure in Human Adaptation and Not an Inevitable Consequence of Man's Propensity for Conflict.

War (especially when restricted to 'ritualized' fighting) has served evolution by dispersing and spacing groups, controlling population growth, strengthening affiliations, uniting groups and assuring resources for the winning group. It has promoted cooperation and has been the final arbiter in conflict resolution.

Despite the functions war has served in the past, the potential destructiveness of war now makes resorting to it an increasing threat to the ends it supposedly serves (e.g., national security, defense of freedom, protection of resources). It is, perhaps, a maladaptive characteristic in mankind at this point.

War is not inevitable. There have been peoples in different parts of the world who have not organized to fight wars. More importantly, previously fierce warring peoples, such as the Scandinavians, have almost ceased to participate in wars.

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There are no pat methods for developing these attitudes in students and certainly none for producing behavior which might reflect these attitudes. Providing students with opportunities to practice conflict resolution and to feei the sense of outrage that frequently leads to violence may be aids in this direction. Discussion of these very attitudes themselves may be helpful, though it is probably more important to pursue specific knowledge about conflict and add to that pursuit a conscious attempt to develop the attitudes above.

KNOWLEDGE OBJECTIVES

There are several aspects to an understanding of conflict and its resolution. The objectives listed here suggest that you keep clearly in mind what it is that you are focusing on in any particular lesson with regard to conflict. The justification for each of the following objectives is implicit in the set of propositions which follow later. You will see that they relate fairly directly to many of the objectives listed here. The objectives in studying conflict should be to develop in students:

.An understanding of what conflict is: its nature, dynamics and effects on the participants.

.An ability to define and defend their own values and to cope with value conflicts when the parties to the conflict are operating from different value systems (as in international and much intra- and inter-group conflict).

.An understanding of several alternative means for resolving conflict: avoidance or withdrawal, conquest (frequently through violent means), and non-violent processes of conflict resolution.

.An understanding of how unilateral conflict resolution strategies--both violent and non-violent--affect the resolution process and the possibilities for achieving important goals.

.A basic understanding of the roots of aggression and violence in man: his aggressive feelings resulting from interrupted goals, his violence often representing the failure of other methods of conflict resolution, and the danger of violence and war as means of achieving goals or resolving conflicts.

THE PROCESS OF CONFLICT AND ITS RESOLUTION: A MODEL

There is no widely accepted model of how conflict is processed. Few social scientists would even agree that there is a single or universal understanding which can apply to all conflicts. In fact, many would insist that there is little or no relationship between the dynamics of interpersonal conflicts and those involving large groups such as nations. Yet, a careful reading of the literature does suggest some common themes that have applicability to all levels and types of conflict. The diagram on page 9 is one synthesis of the wide-ranging ideas prevalent in the field today.

Without showing this diagram to your students, one interesting exercise would be for students to construct their own models of conflict at different times during a unit of study on conflict. They can compare their own models as they become more sophisticated throughout the course and students can compare each other's models to try to arrive at some synthesis within the class.

Each element in the model is used as a handle around which a series of propositions about the various aspects of conflict has been identified for study. The content and activities which can be used to explore these ideas are infinite. The hope is that by reading through these propositions, you will think of ways to test them with content you're already presenting in your classes.

Diablo Valley Education Project
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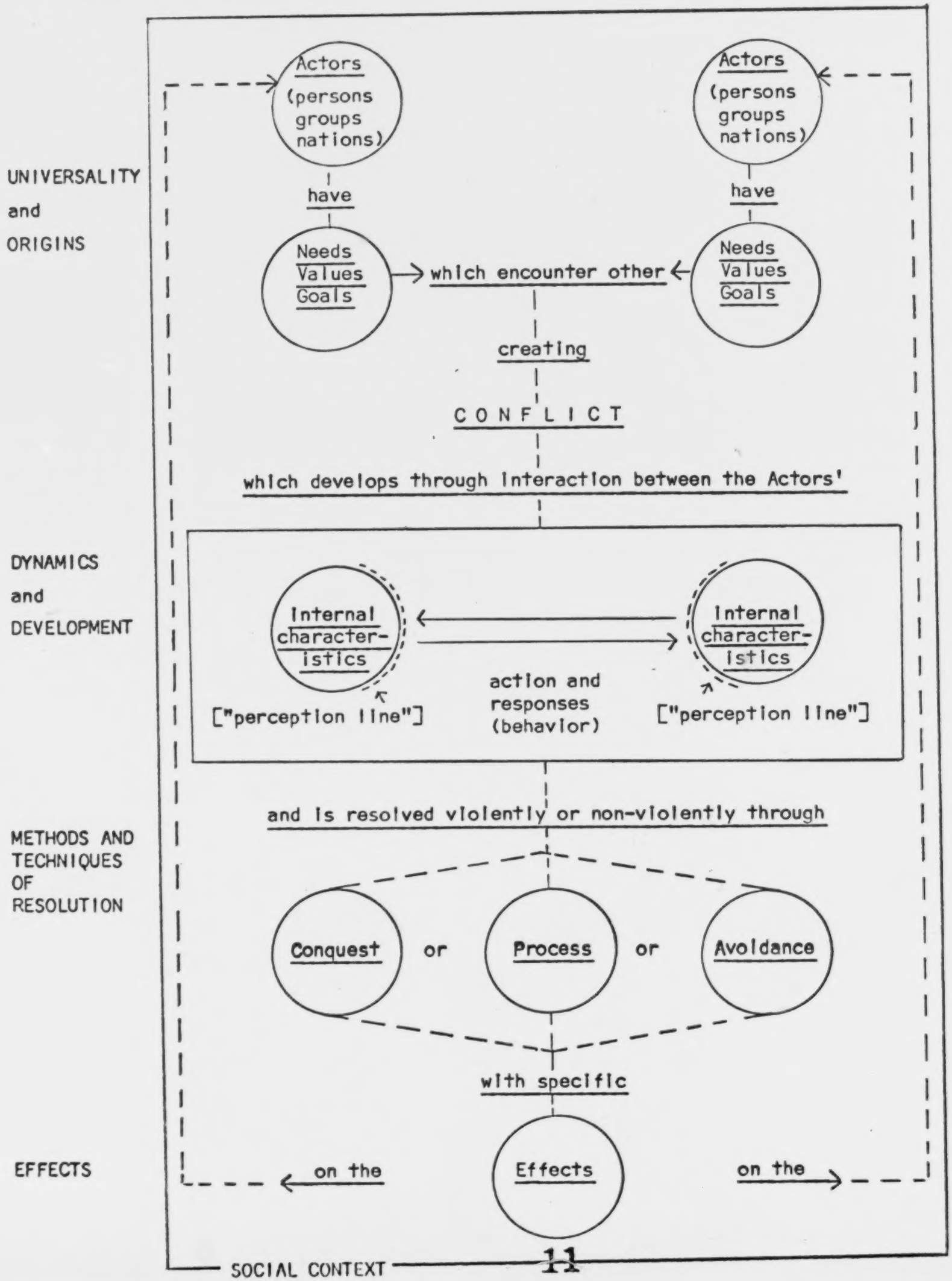
THE PROCESS OF CONFLICT AND ITS RESOLUTION



AN ORGANIZATION OF PROPOSITIONS

Mack and Snyder discuss some fifty propositions dealing with conflict at every level of life experience.* Their work is based on a review of over two hundred propositions developed by several other authors. None of these authors is very confident of the propositions suggested, even though many are based on considerable data. Such is the nature of the subject: murky. Faced with such uncertainty on the part of scholars, the teacher is tempted either to ignore the subject of conflict as too complex to handle or to introduce various content samples with no strategy whatsoever. To help avoid both of these approaches, a simplified outline of the concept is suggested together with a host of propositions which can be explored using a wide range of examples from all the disciplines.

THE BIG IDEAS

.Universality.

Conflict is a natural part of life experience at every level of human relations.

.Nature and Origins.

Conflict occurs when two or more parties perceive and pursue mutually imcompatible objectives or use mutually incompatible methods in their pursuit of the objectives.

.Dynamics.

The interruption of an individual's or group's plan of action creates a stressful situation which is signalled by anger or fear and which, in turn, can serve to stimulate goal oriented problem-solving behavior (coping).

.Development.

The manner in which a conflict develops is affected by:

- -the level of organization (e.g., intrapersonal to international) at which the conflict takes place,
- -the internal characteristics of the parties involved,
- -the prior relationships of the parties to each other,
- -the nature and scope of the disputed issues,

* Raymond W. Mack and Richard C. Snyder, "The Analysis of Social Conflict--An Overview and Synthesis," Journal of Conflict Resolution, June 1957, pp 212-248.

-the social background of the actors,

-the perceptions of the consequences to the participants.

.Methods of Resolution.

Conflicts can be resolved through avoidance or withdrawal, defensive or deliberate violence and non-violent processes.

.Effects of Unilateral Action.

The unilateral actions of the conflicting parties profoundly affect whether the conflict will be resolved violently or non-violently.

.Effects on Participants.

The effect of the conflict on the participants can be either functional or dysfunctional--constructive or destructive--positive or negative--to the parties involved.

DETAILED PROPOSITIONS AND A FEW SUGGESTED STUDENT ACTIVITIES

This is not an exhaustive list of propositions on conflict, and the student activities are mere hints at the rich engagement possible. The point of this section is to provide a quick reference to some key ideas involved in conflict so that no matter what aspect is being taught, other elements from this outline can be explored.

If the ideas which follow seem just too overwhelming, then keep these simple questions in mind as you examine any conflict:

-What signalled that a conflict was taking place? fear? anger?

-What are the disputed issues? Are they over goals or means?

-Are there any alternative goals or means available to the participants? What are they?

-What method of resolution was used or is available? Is it formal or informal?

-Is the resolution violent or non-violent? What could have been done to keep it non-violent?

-What unilateral acts of participants are affecting or could affect, the outcome?

-What effect did the conflict have on the participants? Could that effect have been different with an alternate course of action? What action?

Universality

Conflict is a natural part of life experience at every level of human realtions.

- .All human beings and social organizations exist in a state of balance or equilibrium which from time to time is threatened by changes in their natural and social environment giving rise to conflict within or between them.
- .When two or more parties come into contact with each other, some elements of conflict will inevitably emerge.
- .Even if the initial relationship is primarily devisive, at least a few strands of understanding and reciprocation will emerge.

Student Activity: Keep a log each day of every example of conflict encountered--at home, in school, read in the newspapers, seen on TV. After two days of this, have students build a classification system for their conflicts. Then compare various classifications in class and let each student submit a second system after the discussion. Note how conflict pervades every aspect of life. The classifying exercise will prepare students to handle other aspects of conflict.

Nature and Origins

Conflict occurs when two or more parties perceive and pursue mutually incompatible objectives or use mutually imcompatible methods in their pursuit of objectives.

- .Conflict arises within the individual when he perceives or experiences within himself mutually incompatible aims or objectives.
- .The perceptions, accurate or inaccurate, based on previous experiences and/or future expectations of the interacting parties tend to determine whether their responses to conflicts will be primarily competitive or cooperative.

Student Activity: Students choose five examples of different conflicts from the list in the previous exercise and identify the mutually incompatible goal or method used in pursuing the objective. What were the perceptions of each party (accurate or inaccurate)? Was the attitude competitive or cooperative? Was the conflict within the individual or between individuals or groups?

Dynamics

When an individual's or group's plan of action is interrupted, a stressful situation is created which is signaled by anger or fear and which can serve to stimulate goal-oriented problem-solving behavior (coping).

- .The source of the stress, real or imagined, must be perceived before conflict resolution processes can be initiated.
- .The degree of stress will largely determine the types of responses of the parties in conflict.

-As the situational stress increases within an optimal range wherein usual problem-solving techniques fail, vigilance becomes high, openness to new information occurs along with a heightened potential for learning, corresponding physiological preparedness takes place, and the individual or group enters a highly motivated state which holds potential for maximum application of coping skills and for learning new skills.

-As situational stress increases beyond an optimal range, the stress itself serves to interfere with constructive coping behavior, attention is diverted from the task at hand, communication among the parties is restricted, stereotypic behavior becomes dominant, actors will look for threats and respond with counter-threats, time will be perceived as an increasingly salient factor in decision-making, factors affecting the immediate future will seem much more important than long-range considerations or possible outcomes, the range of alternatives available to the actor will seem more restricted than those of his adversaries.

-Further increase in stress levels produces defensive reactions which can frequently lead to violence setting in. Participants become exclusively oriented to present and past events with no concern for the future, adopt a highly personalized view of their situation, become inclined toward action for its own sake to relieve stress, distort perceptions which, in turn, leads to inadequate appraisal of outcomes, and launch attacks on immediate obstacles perceived to be in the path of their objectives.

-In interpersonal, intergroup and international conflicts, the higher the stress levels, the greater the probability that the conflict will escalate further. That is, an escalating conflict results when the perceived action of one party triggers a stronger response from the second party, which in turn triggers an even stronger reaction from the original party, ultimately resulting in violence unless tension reducing action is introduced.

Student Activity: Read a detailed account of the Attica Prison riot--both the situation in the months before the riot and the crisis which led to the final violence. Look for evidence of the interrupted goals, the early coping, the breakdown of communication, etc., as described in these propositions. Alternatively, analyze the case study of a murder, the crisis of 1914 or the Cuban Missile Crisis, looking for some of the same dynamics.

Development

The manner in which a conflict develops is significantly affected by:

.The level at which the conflict takes place, from intrapersonal to international.

.The internal characteristics of the parties, including: their values and motivations, aspirations and objectives, resources

for waging or resolving conflict, beliefs about the desirability or undesirability of conflict, beliefs about strategies and tactics, the degree of intragroup cohesion, the nature of the intragroup decision-making process, and the degree of centralization of intragroup control.

.The prior relationships among the parties, including: their beliefs and expectations about one another, the degree of polarization and the tension between them.

.The nature and scope of the disputed issues, including: their rigidity of formulation and frequency of occurrence.

.The social background of the actors, including: culture, economic level, acceptance of authority, degree of integration in the society, and availability of institutions for resolving or regulating the conflict.

.The perceptions of the consequences to the participants, including: the gains or losses relating to the immediate issue in question, the precedents established, the internal changes in the participants resulting from the conflict, the long-term effects on the relationship between the involved parties, and the reputation that each party develops in the eyes of the various audiences.

Student Activity: Choose three different conflicts you are familiar with: one within yourself, one within a group to which you belong and one between the US and another country. Identify all the factors you can that affect each conflict. Find at least one factor for each category listed in the above proposition.

Methods of Resolution

Conflicts can be resolved through avoidance or withdrawal, defensive or deliberate violence, and non-violent processes.

.Avoidance: Conflicts may be resolved through unilateral or mutual withdrawal from the field of conflict or by relinquishing goals and values previously held.

.Conquest: Conflicts may be resolved through the violent or non-violent elimination of one of the conflicting parties.

-Defensive or unplanned violence tends to occur spontaneously as an attempt to resolve conflict when:

.few or no alternative means or goals seem available;

.the interrupted goal or dashed hope is important or highly valued, close at hand or felt strongly to be deserved;

.factors in the situation create feelings in the conflicting party which makes it seem that there is no future or that the future is unimportant;

.the party takes a personal point of view and feels abandoned or alienated from any sources of help;

.action itself becomes a goal irrespective of any other outcomes.

-Deliberate violence tends to occur when it has the prior approval and subsequent justification of the party planning its use and it may be triggered by one or more of the causes of defensive violence (noted above). Factors in justification include:

.attributing evil motives to 'outsiders';

.attributing violent behavior to 'outsiders';

.seeing the cause being fought for as justifying any behavior;

.seeing the use of violence as the lesser of two evils (the other being the conditions which might ensue if violence were not used);

.developing supporting concepts and traditions such as heroism, discipline, military status, patriotism, deterrence and power for peace. (These and similar concepts are used by the modern nation-state to justify the maintenance of violent forces and make them acceptable to succeeding generations.)

-In intrasocietal and international conflicts, non-violent conquest occurs when one party voluntarily agrees to end its existence (e.g., corporate mergers, municipal mergers, voluntary federation of states into one nation).

.Non-violent Processes: Parties to a conflict can remain in contact with each other, retain their goals (in whole or in part) and resolve their conflicts without violence. However, they must first recognize the existence of the conflict (see Dynamics), determine its real causes and search for alternative goals and solutions before non-violent resolution can be effective. Formal and sometimes institutionalized means of non-violent conflict resolution include:

-Reconciliation: Conflicts may be resolved when the parties to the conflict change their value positions so that they come to have common preferences in the joint field.

-Compromise: Conflicts may be resolved when the conflicting parties maintain divergent preferred positions in the common field, but each agrees to less than his ideal position rather than continuing the conflict. This includes:

.bargaining, whereby the parties reach positions in the joint field acceptable to both but which are less than the ideal of either.

.conciliation, whereby a third party intervenes to clarify misunderstandings between the conflicting parties so that they can more readily reach positions in the joint field.

.mediation, whereby a third party, respected by the conflicting parties, suggests solutions involving a change in goals which become acceptable to both parties while not satisfying either completely.

-Award: Conflicts may be resolved when both parties either agree or are forced to accept the verdict of an outside agency rather than continuing the conflict. This includes:

.administration, whereby a central authority is mutually recognized as having the power of "award" in the joint field.

.arbitration, whereby the parties to a conflict agree to submit their cases to an impartial arbitrator and to abide by his judgment.

.adjudication, whereby conflicts may be resolved by a legal institution having jurisdiction over the conflicting parties and the power to enforce its decision.

.legislative settlement, whereby conflicts over what the law should be are resolved within a legislative body through the use of all the procedural means noted above and with a final resolution based on a predetermined voting procedure.

-Electoral process: Conflicts may be resolved by submitting the issue to a vote of the eligible electors according to a predetermined procedure.

Student Activity: View three TV programs: a typical western or cops and robbers show, a situation comedy and a show which emphasizes elections or adjudication as a means of settling disputes. Use the propositions above to identify the type of resolution method used in the conflicts identified in each show. If violence was used, what do you think triggered it? Was it deliberate or defensive violence? How could it have been avoided? What non-violent processes were open to the conflicting parties? Why weren't they used? Or were they?

Effects of Unilateral Action

The unilateral actions of the conflicting parties profoundly affect whether the conflict will be resolved violently or non-violently.

.Unilateral threats or acts of violence (or anything perceived as such by the opponent) tend to reduce the likelihood of conflict resolution by non-violent means. Such acts or threats tend to evoke reciprocal threats or acts of violence from the contending party, thus escalating the conflict.

.The probability of conflict resolution may be significantly improved by the unilateral acts of one or both of the parties to the conflict:

-Changing the demands of one party (e.g., requesting a decision different from one already rejected by an opponent; asking a different person for a decision, one more able to make the desired decision; narrowing the demands to more specific matters; fractionating the demands, indicating how much response is required now, how much later and specifically from which parties).

-Changing the offer of one party (e.g., improving what happens to an adversary if the demands are met, i.e., providing the benefits sooner; creating a positive opportunity which will fade if not acted upon soon; stating objectives in terms already espoused by the adversary or which are publicly supported by important third parties or by world opinion; taking steps to increase the level of the scarce value or resource involved in the conflict).

-Changing the threat or consequences to the opponent (e.g., appealing to whatever law, legal institution(s) or higher authority is recognized by both sides; proposing laws or legal institutions which, if they existed, would permit fair resolution of the dispute; reducing the disadvantages to the adversary if the demands are met; making the offer more credible by offering guarantees and avoiding bluffs).

.Acts designed by the initiator to be either threatening or conciliatory may still be perceived by the opponent as their opposites.

.Power, coercion and moral suasion exist in non-violent form and can be deliberately employed in conflicts to pursue a goal even though violently opposed (e.g., boycotts, strikes, non-violent resistance, civil disobedience can all be used to reinforce the demands or offers mentioned above).

Student Activities: Play a simulation such as Dangerous Parallel, Star Power or The Road Game.* In the debriefing, identify specific conflicts in which different unilateral action might have resolved the conflict. Students should actually formulate the alternative offers or demands. Play a second game with special emphasis on unilateral actions toward resolution.

Effects on Participants

Note: The effect of a conflict on a party involved will be seen as functional or dysfunctional depending on his particular perspective.

* Dangerous Parallel, Scott, Foresman & Co., 1900 East Lake Avenue, Glenview, Illinois 60025; Star Power, Western Behavioral Sciences Institute, 1150 Silverado, La Jolla, California 92037; The Road Game, Herder & Herder, 232 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10016.

The importance of the following propositions is not to make categorical value judgments about them as good or bad, but to simply be aware of the effects that are possible.

Responses to conflicts can be either functional or dysfunctional--constructive or destructive--positive or negative--to the parties involved.

- .Social systems lacking minimal social solidarity and individuals lacking personal coping skills are likely to disintegrate in the face of external threats, although some unity may be despotically enforced or coping may occur.
- .Groups or individuals engaged in continued struggle with the "outside" tend to be intolerant within or intolerant to differing viewpoints; they are unlikely to tolerate more than limited departures from the group unity or from their individual position.
- .Group conflicts in which the participants feel that they are fighting not for self but for the ideals of the group they represent, are likely to be more tenacious and merciless than those that are fought for personal reasons.
- .Continued violent conflict depletes resources required by all parties to meet social needs.
- .Continued violent conflict causes dehumanization of the individuals involved, thus making them more callous to suffering of their opponents.
- .Intergroup conflict can set group boundaries by strengthening group cohesiveness and separateness from other groups, and it reduces intragroup tension, facilitating social interaction within the group.
- .Conflict can strengthen or alter group and individual norms.
- .Conflict stimulates problem solving activity by focusing attention on new issues and environmental demands for change.
- .Conflict can result in the identification and clarification of the issues involved.

Student Activities: Read a novel (e.g., Lord of the Flies) or see a movie which has examples of interpersonal and intergroup conflicts. Identify the effects the conflicts had on the participants and then determine whether those effects were positive or negative for the parties involved. Imagine yourself in the role of one of the characters in the story. What effect would the conflict have had on you? How could you have changed it for the better? How could the conflict have been managed to make it positive and functional for everyone involved?